1: Metraux E-5 (1934-1935) 1940
OY2 Easter Islanders OY2

CLOTHING

177
291
511

Winter months are decidedly cold on Easter Island, and heavy clothing is welcome. Present natives suffer from the cold, and one wonders how they withstood the rainy season with the scanty clothing they wore before European garments were introduced. Since their first contact with Europeans, Easter Islanders have shown a great eagerness for clothes. A shirt or a pair of pants is more valuable to them than any other European article. Fifty years ago both Geiseler and Thomson remarked that for clothes the natives would part with anything. Though present natives rationalize this desire by the necessity for protection against cold, the source of this passion for clothes is vanity (81, vol. 38, pp. 68):

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> They do not care to cover themselves in order to get protection from heat or cold, but they want to show off. Therefore they dress themselves, they adorn themselves, they load themselves with anything which may be hung on one way or another. The man who can secure a gown wears it, two if he has two. The woman who obtains a pair of trousers, a jacket or coat combines them all as elegantly as possible.

Today most of the men wear navy uniforms and the women, who have great difficulty in obtaining clothes, wear parts of uniforms. In olden days, however, women were always more fully dressed than men. The supply of paper mulberry was small and the native garments, though fundamentally like those of eastern Polynesia, were neither as various nor as plentiful as on other islands. Cook found a good market on Easter Island for his Tahitian tapa.

[855]

Only children, the boys until twelve and the girls until nine years old, went naked. Though most of the early visitors state that the natives were naked, they generally add that the sexual organs were covered. Beechey (15, vol. 1, p. 53) infers that some islanders were entirely naked, but he remarks that the "larger portion however wear a maro, made either of fine Indian cloth of a reddish colour, of a wild kind of parsley, or of a species of sea weed." Easter Island men who boarded the ship of Admiral du Petit-Thouars wore only a string around the waist, but they swam to the ship and may have left their *maro* ashore.

CLOTHING FOR MEN

[826
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The most usual garment, especially for young men, was a bunch of grass (*mauku uta* or *mauku tai*), suspended from a string of women's hair which was the thickness of the little finger, and tied around the waist. This rudimentary garment is still remembered by the natives and was described by La Pérouse (130, vol. 1, p. 63). Many natives wore hanging from their belts, instead of the bunch of grass, a "kind of net work . . . too thin to conceal anything from sight" or a "small bit of cloth six or eight inches long" (83,

9: Forster T-5 (1774) 1777
OY2 Easter Islanders OY2

parted with a quantity of provisions to us, of which the cultivation must have cost them great pains and labour. The barren refractory soil of their island, the scarcity of domestic animals, and the want of boats and proper materials for fishing, all concur to render their means of subsistence extremely difficult and precarious. Yet the desire of possessing the new toys and curiosities which strangers bring among them, hurried them away, and prevented their reflecting on the urgency of their own most natural and unavoidable wants. In this, as in numberless other circumstances, they agree with the tribes who inhabit New Zealand, the Friendly and the Society Islands, and who seem to have had one common origin with them. Their features are very similar, so that the general character may easily be distinguished. Their colour, a yellowish brown, most like the hue of the New Zealanders; their art of puncturing, the use of the mulberry-bark for clothing, the predilection for red paint and red dresses, the shape and workmanship of their clubs, the mode of dressing their victuals, all form a strong resemblance to the natives of the islands above mentioned. We may add to these, the simplicity of their languages, that of Easter Island being a dialect which, in many respects, resembles that of New Zealand, especially in the harshness of pronunciation and the use of gutturals, and yet, in other instances, partakes of that of Taheitee.

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